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A PEOPLES' COVENANT OF PEACE

THE PARIS CONFERENCE RATIFIES THE NATIONS' DESIRES—PRESIDENT WILSON AND PREMIER LLOYD-GEORGE THE FORMAL SPOKESMEN

On January 25, at the second plenary session of the full complement of nations sitting at the Peace Conference board, with delegates of the press of the world present, and midst scenes of dignity and solemnity worthy of the momentous event, the foundation of the League of Nations, was laid by unanimous adoption of the following resolution:

The Conference, having considered the proposals for the creation of a League of Nations resolved that—

It is essential to the maintenance of the world settlement which the associated nations now are met to establish that a League of Nations be created to promote international obligations and to provide safeguards against war. This League should be created as an integral part of the general treaty of peace and should be open to every civilized nation which can be relied on to promote its objects.

The members of the League should periodically meet in international conference and should have a permanent organization and secretaries to carry on the business of the League in the intervals between the conferences.

The Conference therefore appoints a committee representative of the associated governments to work out the details of the constitution and the functions of the League.

This committee, as later announced, had as its members: For the United States, President Wilson and Colonel Edward M. House; for Great Britain, Lord Robert Cecil and General Jan Christian Smuts; for France, Leon Bourgeois and Ferdinand Larnaude, dean of the faculty of law of the University of Paris; for Italy, Premier Orlando and Viterio Scialoia; for Japan, Viscount Chinda and K. Ochiai.

Following formal introduction of this memorable covenant, President Wilson arose and said:

Mr. Chairman: I consider it a distinguished privilege to be permitted to open the discussion in this Conference on the League of Nations. We have assembled for two purposes—to make the present settlements which have been rendered necessary by this war, and also to secure the peace of the world, not only by the present settlements, but by the arrangements we shall make at this Conference for its maintenance.

The League of Nations seems to me to be necessary for both of these purposes. There are many complicated questions connected with the present settlements, which, perhaps, cannot be successfully worked out to an ultimate issue by the decisions we shall arrive at here. I can easily conceive that many of these settlements will need subsequent consideration; that many of the decisions we make shall need subsequent alteration in some degree, for if I may judge by my own study of some of these questions they are not susceptible for confident judgments at present.

It is therefore necessary that we should set up some machinery by which the work of this Conference should be rendered complete.

Representatives of People.

We have assembled here for the purpose of doing very much more than making the present settlements that are necessary. We are assembled under very peculiar conditions of world opinion. I may say, without straining the point, that we are not the representatives of governments, but representatives of peoples.

It will not suffice to satisfy government circles anywhere. It is necessary that we should satisfy the opinion of mankind.

The burdens of this war have fallen in an unusual degree upon the whole population of the countries involved. I do not need to draw for you the picture of how the burden has been thrown back from the front upon the older men, upon the women, upon the children, upon the homes of the civilized world, and how the real strain of the war has come where the eye of the government could not reach, but where the heart of humanity beats.

Processes Can Be Permanent.

We are bidden by these people to make a peace which will make them secure. We are bidden by these people to see to it that this strain does not come upon them again. And I venture to say that it has been possible for them to bear this strain because they hoped that those who represented them could get together after this war and make such another sacrifice unnecessary.

It is solem obligation on our part, therefore, to make permanent arrangements that justice shall be rendered and peace maintained.

This is the central object of our meeting. Settlements may be temporary, but the action of the nations in the interest of peace and justice must be permanent. We can set up permanent processes. We may not be able to set up a permanent decision.

Therefore, it seems to me that we must take as far as we can a picture of the world into our minds. Is it not a startling circumstance, for one thing, that the great discoveries of science, that the quiet studies of men in laboratories, that the thoughtful developments which have taken place in quiet lecture rooms have now been turned to the destruction of civilization? The powers of destruction have not so much multiplied as they have gained facilities.

The enemy whom we have just overcome had at his seats of learning some of the principal centers of scientific study and discovery, and he used them in order to make destruction sudden and complete. And only the watchful and continuous co-operation of men can see to it that science, as well as armed men, is kept within the harness of civilization.

America's Ideal Stand.

In a sense, the United States is less interested in this subject than the other nations here assembled. With her great territory and her extensive sea borders, it is less likely that the United States should suffer from the attack of enemies than that other nations should suffer. And the ardor of the United States—for it is a very deep and genuine ardor—for the society of nations is not an ardor springing out of fear or apprehension, but an ardor springing out of the ideals which have come in the consciousness of this war.

In coming into this war the United States never for a moment thought that she was intervening in the politics of Europe or the politics of Asia, or the politics of any part of the world. Her thought was that all the world had now become conscious that there was a single cause of justice and of liberty for men of every kind and place.

Therefore, the United States should feel that its part in this war should be played in vain if there ensued upon it abortive European settlements. It would feel that it could not take part in guaranteeing those European settlements unless that guarantee involved the continuous superintendence of the peace of the world by the associated nations of the world.

Therefore, it seems to me that we must concern our best judgment in order to make this League of Nations a vital thing—a thing sometimes called into life to meet an exigency—but always functioning in watchful attendance upon the interests of the nations, and that its continuity should be a vital continuity; that its functions or continuing functions do not permit an intermission of its watchfulness and of its labor; that it should be the eye of nations to keep watch upon the common interest—an eye that did not slumber, an eye that was everywhere watchful and attentive.

Plain People Rule.

And if we do not make it vital, what shall we do? We shall disappoint the expectations of the peoples. This is what their thought centers upon.

I had the very delightful experience of visiting several nations since I came to this side of the water, and every time the voice of the body of the people reached me, through any representative, at the front of the plea stood the hope of the League of Nations.

Gentlemen, the select classes of mankind are no longer the governors of mankind. The fortunes of mankind are now in the hands of the plain people of the whole world. Satisfy them and you have justified their confidence not only, but have established peace. Fail to satisfy them and no arrangement that you can make will either set up or steady the peace of the world.

You can imagine, I dare say, the sentiments and the purpose with which the representatives of the United States support this great project for a League of Nations. We regard it as the keynote of the whole, which expressed our purposes and ideals in this war and which the associated nations have accepted as the basis of a settlement.

If we return to the United States without having made every effort in our power to realize this program, we should return to meet the merited scorn of our fellow citizens. For they are a body that constitute a great democracy. They expect their leaders to speak, their representatives to be their servants.

We have no choice but to obey their mandate. But it is with the greatest enthusiasm and pleasure that we accept that mandate. And because this is the keynote of the whole fabric, we have pledged our every purpose to it, as we have to every item of the fabric. We would not dare abate a single item of the program which constitutes our instructions; we would not dare to compromise upon any matter as the champion of this thing—this peace of the world, this attitude of justice, this principle that we are the masters of no peoples, but are here to see that every people in the world shall choose its own masters and govern its own destinies, not as we wish, but as they wish.

Must Destroy War's Causes.

We are here to see, in short, that the very foundations of this war are swept away. Those foundations were the private choice of a small coterie of civil rulers and military staffs. Those foundations were the aggression of great powers upon the small. Those foundations were the holding together of empires of unwilling subjects by the duress of arms. Those foundations were the power of small bodies of men to wield their will and use mankind as pawns in a game.

And nothing less than the emancipation of the world from these things will accomplish peace.

You can see that the representatives of the United States are, therefore, never put to the embarrassment of choosing a way of expediency, because they have had laid down before them the unalterable lines of principles. And, thank God, these lines have been accepted as the lines of settlements by all the highminded men who have had to do with the beginning of this great business.

Will End Anxiety.

I hope, Mr. Chairman, when it is known, as I feel confident it will be known, that we have adopted the principle of the League of Nations, and means to work out that principle in effective action, we shall by that single thing have lifted a great part of the load of anxiety from the hearts of men everywhere.

We stand in a peculiar cause. As I go about the streets here I see everywhere the American uniform. Those men came into the war after we had uttered our purpose. They came as crusaders, not merely to win a war, but to win a cause. And I am responsible to them, for it falls to me to formulate the purpose for which I asked them to fight, and I, like them, must be a crusader for these things, whatever it costs and whatever it may be necessary to do in honor to accomplish the object for which they fought.

Not Standing Alone.

I have been glad to find from day to day that there is no question of our standing alone in this matter, for there are champions of this cause upon every hand. I am merely avowing this in order that you may understand why, perhaps, it fell to us, who are disengaged from the politics of this great continent and of the Orient, to suggest that this was the keystone of the arch, and why it occurred to the generous mind of our president to call upon me to open this debate. It is not because we alone represent this idea, but because it is our privilege to associate ourselves with you in representing it.

I have only tried in what I have said to give you the fountains of the enthusiasm which is within us for this thing, for those fountains spring, it seems to me, from all the ancient wrongs and sympathies of mankind, and the very pulse of the world seems to beat to the fullest in this enterprise.

The rules of the assembly forbade applause, but correspondents agree that the effect of this speech was deep and moving.

Britain's Premier Mr. Llyod-George, in seconding the resolution, said:

I wish to second this resolution. After the noble speech of the American President, I feel that no observations are needed in order to commend this resolution to the Conference, and I should not have intervened at all had it not been that I wished to state how emphatically the people of the British Empire are behind this proposal.

And if the national leaders have not been able during the last five years to devote as much time as they would like to its advocacy, it is because their time and their energy have been absorbed in the exigencies of a terrible struggle.

The Desolation of France.

Had there been the slightest doubt in my mind as to the wisdom of this scheme, it would have vanished before an irresistible appeal made to me by the spectacle I witnessed last Sunday. I visited a region which but a few years ago was one of the fairest in an exceptionally fair land.

I found it in a ruin and a desolation. I drove for hours through a country which did not appear like the habitation of living men and women and children, but like the excavation of a bared province, shattered and torn. I went to one city where I witnessed a scene of devastation that no indemnity can ever repair—one of the beautiful things of the world disfigured and defaced beyond repair.

And one of the cruelest features to my mind was what I could see had happened—that Frenchmen who love their land almost beyond any nation, in order to establish the justice of their cause had to assist the cruel enemy in demolishing their homes, and I felt that these are the results—only part of the results.

Had I been there three months ago I would have witnessed something that I dare not describe. But I saw acres of graves of the fallen. And these were the results of the only methods, the only organized methods, that civilized nations have ever attempted or established to settle disputes amongst each other. And my feeling was: Surely it is time that a saner plan for settling disputes between peoples ought to be established than this organized savagery.

I don't know whether this will succeed. But if we attempt it, the attempt will be a success, and for that reason I second the proposal.

Italy's Prime Minister, Vittorio Orlando, and M. Leon Bourgeois, the eminent French jurist and former Premier; Camille Husyman, the Belgian spokesman, and delegates from Poland and China followed with approving remarks, and then President Clemenceau asked if there were any objections, and as there were none he declared the resolution unanimously adopted.